

# Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

*“Many Cultures, One Voice:  
Promote Equality and Inclusion”*

May 2015

# Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

The United States has recognized the month of May as a time to acknowledge the achievements and contributions to the American story by Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Hawaiians (AAPIs).

We celebrate the cultural traditions, ancestry, native languages, and unique experiences represented among more than 56 ethnic groups (speaking over 100 languages) from Asia and the Pacific Islands who live in the United States.

# Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

The month of May was chosen to commemorate the immigration of the first Japanese to the United States on May 7, 1843.

It was also chosen to mark the anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad on May 10, 1869.

The majority of the workers who laid the tracks were Chinese immigrants.





# ASIAN AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER HERITAGE MONTH



**“MANY CULTURES,  
ONE VOICE:  
PROMOTE EQUALITY  
AND INCLUSION”**



Designed by Peter Heston for the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute

**MAY 2015**

While these AAPI communities have roots that span the globe, their success stories are uniquely American.

This presentation provides snapshots that briefly cover the integral role played by a few of the many AAPIs who helped shape this nation.

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Florence Smith Finch

Florence Smith Finch, the daughter of an American soldier and a Filipino mother, was working for the U.S. Army during World War II when the Japanese occupied the Philippines.

Claiming Filipino citizenship, she avoided being imprisoned with other enemy nationals at Santo Tomas Internment Camp in Manila.



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She joined the underground resistance movement and smuggled food, medicine, and supplies to American captives. Eventually, she was arrested by the Japanese, tortured, and sentenced to three years imprisonment.

After serving five months of her sentence, Finch was liberated by American forces. Returning to the United States aboard a Coast Guard transport, she headed for Buffalo, New York, her father's hometown.

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She then enlisted in the Coast Guard to “avenge the death of her late husband,” a Navy PT boat crewman killed at Corregidor.

Seaman First Class Finch was the first U.S Coast Guard Women's Reserve member to receive the Asian-Pacific Campaign ribbon in recognition of her service in the Philippines.

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At the end of the war, she was awarded the civilian U.S. Medal of Freedom.

Of her wartime activities she said: *“I feel very humble because my activities in the war effort were trivial compared with those of people who gave their lives for their country.”*

In 1995, the Coast Guard honored her service when it named a building on Sand Island, Hawaii, after her.



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When Second Lieutenant Young Oak Kim reported for duty at Camp Shelby, in 1943, the commander of the 100th Battalion, offered him an immediate transfer because *“Koreans and Japanese don’t always get along.”*

He refused on the spot: *“You’re wrong. They’re Americans, I’m American, and we’re going to fight for America.”* The young Korean American lieutenant was being both patriotic and pragmatic.



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He would go on to fight with the 442nd, the mostly highly-decorated combat unit in World War II.

His heroic combat actions in the Pacific conflict earned Kim the moniker, “The Crazy Korean.”

He went to fight the Germans, where he was critically wounded.

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Senator Daniel Inouye, a fellow recipient of the Medal of Honor, remembered Kim's service during World War II, *"There was one name that always commanded attention and respect: Capt. Kim's. He was a bona fide hero of the 100th Infantry Battalion."*

He went on to say, *"When I got to meet him after I entered combat, my respect and admiration of him grew because he was such a fearless leader who, through his deeds, inspired his men."*



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After World War II, Kim reenlisted in the Army. He served 30 years, and rose to the rank of colonel before retiring as the most decorated Asian American in the U.S. military.

He maintained strong ties to his former comrades in the 100th Battalion. Though he was a Korean American, he was one of the founders of the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles and of the Go For Broke National Education Center in California.

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Decades after retiring, Kim served on the Department of Defense panel reviewing charges of American war crimes at No Gun Ri during the Korean War.

In 2005, the consul general of France awarded him the Legion of Honor in a ceremony at the Go For Broke Monument in downtown Los Angeles, a few blocks away from the Bunker Hill area of Los Angeles, where he grew up.

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Born in Hawaii, Shizuya Hayashi was a Nisei, a second generation Japanese-American.

He was drafted into the U.S. Army in March 1941. He was given the nickname “Cesar” because his sergeant could not pronounce his name.





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In 1942, Hayashi and 1,400 other Nisei soldiers were sent to Camp McCoy, where they formed the 100th Infantry Battalion, the first mainly Japanese-American combat unit in the history of the U.S. Army.

After completing more than a year of instruction, the 100th became the most intensively-trained unit in the Army. Every man qualified as an expert in numerous different weapons. Their motto was “Remember Pearl Harbor.”

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During a ground assault against an entrenched adversary, he charged and overtook an enemy machine gun position, killing seven men, and two more as they fled.

After his platoon advanced just 200 yards, an enemy anti-aircraft gun opened fire on them. Hayashi returned fire, killing nine of the enemy, taking four prisoners, and driving the remainder of the enemy force from the hill.

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For his actions in November 1943, Hayashi was awarded the Army's second-highest decoration, the Distinguished Service Cross.

In 1998, a comprehensive review was conducted, based on the belief that racial discrimination prevented him and other soldiers of Asian descent from receiving awards they had earned.

As a result, he was awarded the Medal of Honor, the United States' highest decoration for valor.



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Hayashi being presented the  
Medal of Honor by President  
Bill Clinton.

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Hayashi, aged 90, died in 2008.

After Hayashi's passing, Inouye said, *“Shizuya Hayashi will always exemplify the legacy of the Nisei soldiers: determined defenders committed to serving our country with honor — even when many of our own countrymen at that time doubted our patriotism and our willingness to serve in harm's way.”*

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Harry Harris Jr. was promoted to Admiral in 2013 and assumed command of the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

He is the first Asian American to head the U.S. Pacific Fleet, leading the same office from which Admiral Chester Nimitz led the Navy against the Japanese during World War II.





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Harris was born in Japan and raised in Tennessee and Florida. His mother did not teach him Japanese, wanting him to be totally immersed in American culture.

She did, however, tell her son the story of the Japanese-American soldiers who heroically fought in Europe for the 442nd Regiment.

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The story of these Nisei resonated with him.  
*“As a Japanese-American kid growing up in Tennessee, I needed role models,”* Harris said, looking back.

Following graduation from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1978 and designation as a naval flight officer, he was assigned to VP-44, a Patrol Squadron.

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Harris is the highest-ranking Asian-American in the history of the United States Navy, and the first to attain the rank of 4-star Admiral.

He received the Navy League's Stephen Decatur Award for Operational Competence. For his work in diversity and leadership, he has also received the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations Ellis Island Honor Award, the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies Lifetime Achievement Award, and the Who's Who in Asian American Communities Spirit Award.



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In a speech before members of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regiment he said, *“Today our nation draws her strength from those who served in the past, like these veterans of World War II. Our nation draws her strength from those who serve today....Those who serve are part of an unbroken chain linking Americans, generation to generation.”*



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Tulsi Gabbard was raised by a Hindu mother and a Catholic father in “a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-faith family.”



*“My parents...there were five kids in the family and they taught us from a very young age that...the only place happiness can be found is in the service of others.”*



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An advocate for environmental policy, Gabbard successfully ran for the Hawaii State Legislature in 2002, becoming its youngest person ever elected.

A year later, she joined the Hawaii National Guard. In 2004 she voluntarily deployed to Iraq, serving two combat zone tours in the Middle East.





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In 2013 she made history as the first female combat veteran, first Hindu, and first female of Samoan ancestry to become a member of Congress.



*“In the military, I learned that 'leadership' means raising your hand and volunteering for the tough, important assignments.”*

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In 2013, Brigadier General Miyako Schanely, deputy commander of 412th Theater Engineer Command, made history as the first female Army Reserve engineer promoted to general officer.

Her promotion also made her the second Japanese-American woman to be promoted to General Officer.





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Schanely's mother and her father both served in the Air Force. Her stepfather, an Army warrant officer, performed counterintelligence work in the Pacific as the rest of his family was forced into an internment camp.

She credits her military career as a reflection of her family's military heritage, a proud tradition going back to World War II.



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The 412th Theater Engineer Command (TEC) is one of only two such commands in the Army. She had previously served as chief of staff for the 416<sup>th</sup>, the only other TEC.

Additionally, she works for the State University of New York North Country Consortium, a partnership that collaborates to bring a variety of academic programs to Fort Drum and the Northern New York community.

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She hopes her career can serve as an example for younger soldiers—especially women—noting the engineering field is populated mostly by men.

*“We’re seeing improvements in that across the board every year as the military moves to expand opportunities for women.”*

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In 2015, Ravi Chaudhary, an Indian American, was named the new Executive Director for Regions and Center Operations at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).



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As second in command to the Deputy Assistant Administrator, he is also responsible for providing Department of Transportation and FAA-wide services in the areas of operations, safety, policy, corporate and congressional outreach, emergency readiness, facilities management, and centralized support for the National Aerospace System.

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In May 2014, President Barack Obama appointed Chaudhary to the President's advisory commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

He advised the president on executive branch efforts to improve AAPI community's economic and community development, public and private sector collaboration, health, education, and veterans' support.

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Chaudhary is a former Air Force officer, having completed 21 years of service at the Air Force District of Washington, Andrews AFB, Maryland.

He has also served at the Pentagon as a speechwriter and strategic planner in the Secretary of the Air Force Executive Action Group and Deputy Chief of Staff for Air Force Strategic Plans and Programs.



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During his military service, he logged 760 combat hours during multiple deployments since Sept. 11, 2001.

He has logged over 3,000 hours as a pilot and flight test engineer. He holds FAA commercial, multi-engine, and instrument pilot certificates.

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*“As Airmen, we come from all types of communities and walks of life, when we join together to serve our nation, we also garner insight on the communities of our fellow wingmen we may have otherwise have missed out on...These moments of cross cultural exchange have enriched my experiences in the Air Force and will help prepare our future leaders to better meet global challenges.”*

— Ravi Chaudhary

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In an increasingly diverse nation, AAPIs stand apart as one of the most diverse communities.

Generations of Asian American and Pacific Islanders have helped develop and defend the United States, often in the face of tremendous racial and cultural prejudice.

Despite these difficulties, these men and women struggled, sacrificed, and persevered to build a better life for their children and all Americans.



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This observance gives us the opportunity to honor, recognize, and celebrate the rich diversity, leadership, and enduring empowerment of all Asian American, Pacific Islanders, and Native Hawaiians, and their dedicated service and contributions to the betterment of our nation.

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*“With courage, grit, and an abiding belief in American ideals, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders have challenged our Nation to be better.”*

—President Barack Obama

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